



**Public Hearing Testimony before the
Planning and Development Committee
March 18, 2013**

Submitted by: Peter DeBiasi, President/CEO, The *Access* Community Action Agency

HB 6629- AN ACT CONCERNING REGIONALISM IN CONNECTICUT

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members, my name is Peter DeBiasi and I am here to speak in opposition to Section 5 of House Bill 6629 - An Act Concerning Regionalism in Connecticut – which proposes that the Northeast CT Council of Governments take the lead role in addressing human service needs in its catchment area.

I am the President/CEO of the *Access* Community Action Agency, which is the state and federally designated anti-poverty agency for Windham and Tolland Counties. *Access* has been partnering to fight poverty in northeast CT since 1965.

In addition to my leadership role at *Access*, for the past 21 months I have served as the Governor's appointed co-chair of his Cabinet on Nonprofit Health and Human Services, and prior to that I served as co-chair of the Legislatively created Commission on Nonprofit Health and Human Services. I offer this to illustrate my commitment to and understanding of the importance of developing more efficient and effective ways to meet the human service needs of CT residents.

Section 5 of House Bill 6629 proposes that the Northeast CT Council of Governments be paid \$250,000 to conduct a "pilot program" that includes assessment of human service needs across its twelve small rural towns, and development of a plan to meet those needs. Creation of a "regional human services advisory council to prepare the plan required" is part of the pilot.

We find it perplexing that as one of the largest providers of human services in the region, *Access* was unaware of this entire bill and particularly this proposed pilot and council until just last week; and as far as we can tell none of region's non-profit providers were consulted in the development of the bill or the pilot.

If such consultation had taken place, the NECCOG would have known that the *Access* Community Action Agency is in the process of conducting a human services community needs assessment for all of northeast CT – including all NECCOG member towns. We are conducting this comprehensive assessment using exist funds and existing staff while

building on existing reports and assessments, and engaging a wide range of community stakeholders

This process will result in a report titled *Pulse 2013: A Consolidated Report on the Capacity of Northeast CT to Meet Its Community's Needs*. The report will be widely distributed, and used to drive regional and local strategic planning.

And finally, Section 5 proposes that the NECCOG follow-up with a plan "to make available to the Northeastern Region all state and federal funds appropriated for human services". In addition to being a task that does not align with their expertise, implementing this would be virtually impossible due to federal and state statutes, and systems already in place to fund human services.

We believe the NECCOG's expertise and core competencies do not include Human Services; and that the region will be best served by the NECCOG focusing its efforts on the important local strategic initiatives that do in fact align with their expertise and competencies. The suggestion that \$250,000 be paid to NECCOG to underwrite the cost of this proposed pilot in their twelve small rural member towns is misguided.

It's for the reasons stated above, that I strongly urge the Planning and Development Committee to eliminate Section 5 of House Bill 6629, and instead support existing regional collaborative efforts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of meeting the human service needs of communities throughout CT.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.